

***Iowa Outdoors***  
**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
**www.iowadnr.gov**

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[Electronic photos available upon request]

Spirit Lake is On Fire

**NEW WINTER ANGLING RECORD ALREADY ESTABLISHED,  
BIOLOGISTS PREDICT BEST WINTER PERCH FISHING STILL  
AHEAD**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

SPIRIT LAKE----It's the talk of anglers statewide. Spirit Lake perch fishing is on fire. Following an incredible three full months of block buster action, it appears as if the excitement isn't over yet. As spring thaw approaches, angler success is actually on the rise. If the bite were to get any hotter, say locals, it's likely the ice itself would ignite into flame.

Although that last statement may be a bit of a stretch, it does offer a hint as to how good the fishing has been. Here are the facts. Spirit Lake anglers are currently enjoying the most extraordinary perch fishing success since biologists began keeping records in 1957. During a single, 45 day period [January 1 to Feb 15] anglers harvested more than 114,000 yellow perch and released an additional 300,000 back into the lake.

"It's been a phenomenal winter and we've not had a previous ice season that even compares," says DNR District Fisheries Biologist, Mike Hawkins. "I think the real story here is the incredible number of fish being caught. Daily 'car counts' have approached 500 vehicles and there have been more than 17,500 angler trips unto the ice this winter which easily makes it the highest ice fishing effort ever recorded."

Direct interviews with nearly two thousand of those anglers have shown that people are catching an average of 22 perch per trip, and are taking 7 of those fish home. Perch become "angler acceptable" at around seven inches and most fish being harvested

measure from about eight inches to 11 inches in length. Biologists note that current fish densities coupled with high success rates are a perfect recipe for creating “happy campers.” Angling devotee, Jay Cole is one of those campers.

“I didn’t start fishing until early February, but I’ve really been doing well since then,” said Cole. “I usually get on the ice around 9:30 or ten o’clock and fish ‘till noon. I keep the good ones. I don’t take home a limit every single day, but I usually end up with at least ten or fifteen fish to clean.”

“This is the first winter I’ve had time to do this much fishing,” added Cole. “It’s worked out well. I love catching perch and they taste great. It’s just great to be out here on the lake.”

Retired police lieutenant, Terry Dodson agrees.

“I usually get out on the lake at least one or two days per week,” reports Dodson. “You have to do some sorting to get the ones you want, but there are plenty of fish willing to bite. Yesterday, I caught 37 and kept 18. That’s a pretty good average, and I’m getting enough fish to eat.”

Dodson was just dropping his first lure down the hole at around 10 last Wednesday morning. At first nothing, but soon the first group of foraging perch moved through. Things lit up and within fifteen minutes, Dodson had four fresh “keepers” flopping on the clean ice.

But Spirit Lake anglers aren’t the only folks with a smile on their faces these days. Down on Main Street, perch are making cash registers sing.

“The perch fishing is having a huge impact on our local economies,” says Thane Johnson, owner of the famed Kabele’s Trading Post and Lodge. “In addition to area residents, I’ve also had anglers from at least ten states come into the trading post this winter. Our fishing license sales [January/February] are up around 300 percent over last year. Even now, license sales remain strong which means new people are still coming into the area to fish.”

“Bait sales are crazy,” says Johnson. “In one weekend, we sold over 4,000 containers of wax worms alone. When the weather cooperates, we’re doing more business in a weekend than we normally do in a month. It’s not just me. Gas stations, eateries, motels --- they all have the same story. Everyone is excited and everyone is benefiting from the fishing.

“Water clarity is good and a lot of anglers are using Aqua-View [underwater] cameras to fish,” says Johnson. “Before this year, you’d typically see schools of ten or twelve perch move through, and you’d maybe get one or two to bite.

“This winter, you have to see the fish to believe it. When the really big numbers come into view it’s like watching one of those Discovery Channel films showing huge schools of ocean krill. It appears as if there’s absolutely no end to them; the perch are like a fog --- a never ending ribbon of fish. When those schools come through, fish get competitive and you catch perch as fast as you can bring them up,” said Johnson.

“It’s true that Spirit Lake’s perch densities are incredible,” says Hawkins. “Our data suggests that we could have as much as 100 pounds of perch per acre which translates into somewhere between 1.5 million and 2.5 million fish. These populations are just coming into their own, and the best news for anglers is that next season should be even better than this year. I think this has just been a prelude for what’s coming next season.”

But there's no need for anglers to wait until next winter to cash in on the action, says Hawkins. There's still plenty of time to partake in this winter's perch fishing frenzy.

"Regardless of how good the bite has already been this winter, the month of March will typically offer some of the year's best fishing," says Hawkins. "As long as the ice stays, people will be out there. Generally speaking, the later the date the better the fishing."

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## **STATE PARK CAMPSITES CONTINUE TO FILL FOR MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND**

DES MOINES – Iowans are in full Spring Fever mode as they continue to reserve campsites in Iowa State Parks for the Memorial Day Weekend at a rapid pace. Campsites with electricity are beginning to be a rare commodity with nearly one-third of those remaining on Friday gone by Tuesday morning.

There are now eight or fewer electrical campsites available for reservation at Bellevue, Clear Lake, Dolliver, Fairport, Honey Creek both campgrounds, Lake Manawa, Nine Eagles, Stone, Union Grove and Wapsipinicon state parks.

State parks with 10 or more electrical campsites available for reservation are Gull Point, Lake Darling, Lake Wapello, Marble Beach, Pikes Peak, Pilot Knob and Red Haw.

The remaining state parks have either filled all reservable electrical sites or have only the handicap accessible site available for reservation. All state parks will have electrical sites available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

"If people have not made their camping plans by now for Memorial Day Weekend, they should hurry if they want a guaranteed campsite," said Kevin Szcodronski, chief of the DNR's State Parks Bureau.

Campsites can be viewed and reserved at [www.reserveiापarks.com](http://www.reserveiापarks.com) 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Reservations are also taken over the phone by calling 1-877-IAPARKS between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone center is closed on state holidays. Information on Iowa State Parks is available at [www.exploreiापarks.com](http://www.exploreiापarks.com).

The DNR is working with contractors to get Walnut Woods and George Wyth state parks repaired from the storms and floods of 2008. If the work is completed before the Memorial Day Weekend, both parks will be available for camping on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Campers should be aware that Lake Darling and Lake Wapello state parks in southeast Iowa are undergoing lake renovations. Lake Darling will be completely drained for the 2009 season to fix the outlet structure in the dam and to improve the habitat in the lake. Lake Wapello was lowered last year to fix a leak in the dam, to renovate the fishery and improve the in-lake habitat. Lake Wapello will be refilling this spring.

In southwest Iowa, Green Valley State Park is closed while the campground is completely renovated. The schedule calls for the campsite work to be finished by late summer.

**Media Contact: Kevin Szczodronski, chief, State Parks Bureau, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-281-8674.**

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## **YOUTH ARCHERS SQUARE OFF AT STATE CHAMPIONSHIPS**

DES MOINES - The Iowa high school girls basketball tournament won't crown the only state championship at the Iowa Events Center complex this weekend. More than 500 young archers from across the state will be competing as part of the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) state championships on Saturday at Veterans Memorial Auditorium as part of the Iowa Deer Classic.

The National Archery in the Schools Program is international-style target archery offered as part of an in-school curriculum (typically physical education) for grades 4-12. The program is being offered in over 5,000 schools world-wide and in more than 100 schools in Iowa. All competitors in the state championship NASP event must have NASP-style target archery offered as part of an in-school curriculum, although most teams competing also have after-school archery clubs. Individual and co-gender team awards will be presented to the top teams and individuals at the state championship events. College scholarships in the amount of \$1,000 will be presented to the top scoring senior boy and top scoring senior girl archer on behalf of the Iowa State Archery Association and Iowa Bowhunters Association.

Many archers attending the state championships have also participated in the statewide archery season consisting of local archery matches hosted by other schools and clubs. The season started on January 1 and concluded February 28. Season participants who also attend state will be eligible for All-State Team honors. All State Teams will be calculated using the top season score plus the scores shot at the state championship match. Top teams and individuals at the state championship match will be eligible to qualify for the NASP National Championship event to be held May 9/10 at Louisville, Ky.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources hosts the state championship event and offers a one day training course for schools and community volunteers wishing to start the program. Cost share equipment grants are available through the Iowa Archery in the Schools foundation. For more information, visit the DNR Website, or contact Ben Berka, DNR shooting sports coordinator at 515-281-0140 or [Ben.Berka@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Ben.Berka@dnr.iowa.gov).

The following schools will be participating in the Iowa NASP State Championship event: ADM 6 -7 Middle School, Adel; Alburnett Elementary and Junior-Senior High School, Alburnett; Anamosa High School, St. Patrick School, Strawberry Hill, West Middle School, all from Anamosa; Bellevue High School and Marquette High School, Bellevue; Boone Middle School; North Iowa High School, Buffalo Center; Central City Elementary and High School; West High School, Davenport; Diagonal

Elementary and Junior-Senior School; Earlham Elementary, Middle and Senior High School; Cardinal Elementary and Middle-Senior High School, Eldon; Johnston Middle School and Senior High School; Lake Mills Middle School and Senior High School; Central Decatur Jr-Sr High School, Leon; Mount Vernon Middle School and High School; North Mahaska Jr-Sr High School, New Sharon; Spencer Middle School and High School; North Iowa Middle School, Thompson; and West High School, Waterloo.

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## **NATURAL RESOURCE COMMISSION TO MEET MARCH 12 NEAR HAMPTON**

HAMPTON – The Natural Resource Commission of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources will meet at 8:30 a.m., March 12, at the Maynes Grove Four Seasons Lodge, 946 Hwy. 65, south of Hampton.

Commission and DNR staff will meet at 1 p.m., March 11, at Lake Cornelia Park main parking lot, 1768 O'Brien Avenue, five miles northeast of Clarion, for a local tour.

Members of the commission are Kim Francisco, Elizabeth Garst, Carol Kramer, Gregory Drees, Janelle Rettig, William Bird and Tammi Kircher. The Director of the DNR is Richard Leopold.

The following is the agenda for the March meeting.

- Approve Agenda
- Approve Minutes of Feb. 12 Meeting
- Director's Remarks
- Construction Projects
  - Bloody Run and Sny Magill, Allamakee and Clayton Counties – Trout Habitat Improvement
  - Waterloo Creek, Allamakee County – Trout Stream Habitat
  - Lake Darling State Park, Washington County – Six Sediment Ponds
  - Lake Darling State Park, Washington County – Culvert Risers
- Land Acquisition Projects
  - Otter Creek Marsh, Tama County – Dale and JoAnn Fisher
  - Muskrat Slough Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Jones County – Matthew McQuillen
  - Kellerton Bird Conservation Area, Ringgold County – John and Marilyn Besh
  - Loess Hills Wildlife Management Area, Monona County – Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation
- Land Management Projects
  - Management Agreement – Green Island WMA – Roger Keil
  - Grant of Easements – Missouri River – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- Conservation and Recreation Division Budget
- Donations
- Chapter 40 – Boating Speed and Distance Zoning – Petition for Rulemaking

- Chapter 78 – Ginseng Harvesting and Sale – Emergency Filing After Notice
- Chapter 8 – Contracts for Public Improvements and Professional Services – Emergency Filing
- Chapter 61 – State Parks and Recreation Areas – Final Rule: Swimming Outside of Designated Area
- Chapter 61 – State Parks and Recreation Areas – Final Rule: Cabins and Camping
- Chapter 52 – Wildlife Refuges: Notice of Intended Action
- Chapter 91 – Waterfowl and Coot Hunting Seasons: Notice of Intended Action
- Chapter 94 – Nonresident Deer Hunting
- Chapter 95 – Game Harvest Reporting and Landowner-Tenant Registration: Notice of Intended Action
- Chapter 99 – Wild Turkey Fall Hunting: Notice of Intended Action
- Chapter 106 – Deer Hunting by Residents: Notice of Intended Action
- Natural Resource Based Business Opportunities Grant Program
- Fish Habitat Promotion with Local Entities Program Grant Review
- Honey Creek Resort State Park Monthly Update
- Election of NRC Officers Process
- General Discussion
- Items for Next Meeting, April 9, in Story County

**For more information, contact Melissa Speed, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, at 515-281-8650.**

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